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Title : INTERACTIONS BETWEEN STELLER SEA LIONS AND GROUNDFISH FISHERIES IN THE LARGEST ALASKAN FISHING PORT

Category : Conservation

Student : Not Applicable

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Abstract : The occurrence of pinnipeds in populated areas can lead to undesirable interactions. We examined the occurrence of endangered Steller sea lions (Eumetopias jubatus) in Kodiak, the largest fishing port in Alaska. In addition to hauling-out on docks, sea lions frequently haul-out on trawlers via stern ramps. They scavenge catches, often when people are onboard. We conducted year-round counts of sea lions since November 2001 in order to monitor abundance, and thus potential for conflicts. The maximum counts of each day were examined for temporal trends, and compared to groundfish vessel delivery data. In addition, scat remains (N=30) were collected between February and May 2002 from two docks utilized by sea lions, and compared to fishery seasons. Sea lion counts were low before January, peaked in mid-March, and decreased in May (2002 and 2003). In 2002, counts increased in July, peaked towards the end of September, and decreased at the end of October. Generally, increasing trends in the abundance of sea lions and the number of groundfish deliveries were similar. Gadids and Pleuronectiformes were present in 97% and 50% of the scats respectively. Although this appears to be indicative of the fishery seasons (pollock, Pacific cod, and flatfish fisheries were open at various times between January and May 2002), it is likely scavenging sea lions also hunted live prey. We conclude that the abundance of sea lions in Kodiak Harbor is partially influenced by groundfish fisheries, but also by the sea lion breeding season (May-July) and the gregarious nature of sea lions. Investigation into preventing sea lions access to vessels, and education about the hazards of feeding sea lions, intentionally and un-intentionally, is on-going.